

City of Lowell



Open Space and Recreation Plan

2nd Public Meeting Report

August 2018

INTRODUCTION

This spring, City of Lowell Department of Planning and Development (DPD) staff attended several neighborhood group meetings to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, and future of our parks, open spaces, and recreational programs. Feedback from these meetings, responses to our survey, and comments from the Kick-off Meeting set the focus of the 2nd Public Meeting held on May 17.



Second Meeting Focus: review findings from outreach to date, prioritize common themes for further discussion, and identify short- and long-term actions to address those themes

To increase transparency during this planning process, DPD staff have created this report summarizing the ideas shared during the 2nd public meeting. We invite you to review this report and catch up on our planning work to date by reading our [Kick-off Report](#) and our [Neighborhood Meetings Report](#). Our [Open Space Survey](#) is also still active. If you have not yet completed our survey, please do. Our [next public meeting](#) is on Monday August 13 from 6-8pm at the Lowell Senior Center. We hope you will attend, and please send any questions or comments to OpenSpace@LowellMA.gov.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

During this planning process, 10 recurring themes have emerged:

Better Sidewalks and Crosswalks	Better Lighting
More Trees	Bike Lanes
Water-based recreation	Frequent Clean-up and maintenance
Clearer Signage	Events beyond downtown
Dog Parks	Activities for teens and kids

MEETING FORMAT

During the 2nd Public Meeting, DPD staff asked residents to identify four topics (from the 10 themes) to discuss further. Upon arrival, residents received three stickers to vote for their top choices. Residents placed their stickers on poster sheets—one for each theme—that staff had attached to the wall. Once everyone made their selections, staff tallied the scores to determine the four discussion topics.

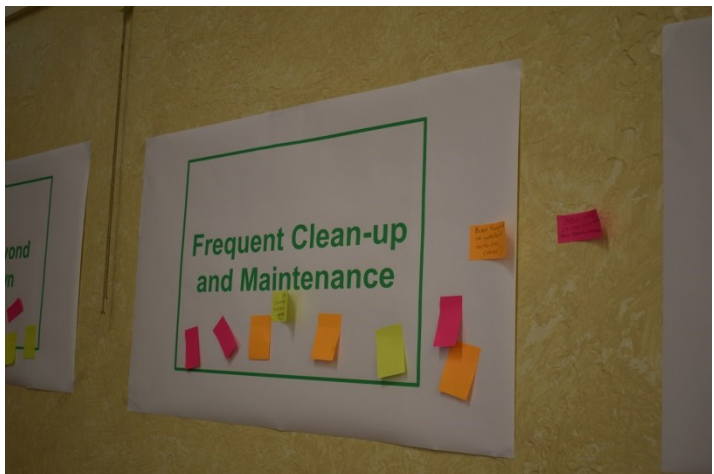
The top four themes were:

1. **Frequent Clean-up & Maintenance**
2. **Better Sidewalks & Crosswalks**
3. **Bike lanes**
4. **Events beyond Downtown**

DPD staff invited residents to sit in groups and chat about these themes. Staff moderated the discussions to focus them on specific short- and long-term actions the City could take to address each theme.

After the discussion, a representative from each table presented one short- and long-term action item that their group had identified for each topic.

DPD staff heard many great suggestions from residents. The following pages summarize these suggestions. For clarity, staff sorted the notes into short- and long-term categories. All suggestions that were repeated at more than one table have been marked accordingly.



Frequent Clean-up & Maintenance:

Short-term ideas:

- The city website is not clear enough; need a dedicated 311 line—phone app—to address community complaints
- Community cleanups have been very successful—more are needed
- Groups should have a printed list of resources available to them (How-to/FAQ on website) to encourage stewardship
 - The City has a Community Action Trailer cart, which has tools for clean-up and maintenance
 - Manpower provided by: UML, high school, ROTC, UTEC. Many students need to fulfill Community Service credits
 - **Q:** Can teens in summer programs help?
- Improve trash collection:
 - Barrels are open top, but they should have covers so that trash doesn't blow around
 - Add recycling bins to the parks
 - Maintenance isn't getting done—trash collection and cleanups need to be more frequent
- The needle problem is everywhere
- Gorham Street—school playgrounds are usually dirty
- Implement strategies to reduce littering:
 - Create signage with listed fines for littering and not picking up after dogs
 - Inform college students during orientation the fines associated with littering
 - If we don't create a culture about cleaning up/not littering we won't be successful
 - **Q:** Can there be (is there) school programming about littering?
- **Q:** Is the Adopt an Island Program still active? If not, it should be reactivated!
- City needs faster response time to clean-up following storms, especially clearing felled trees



Long-term ideas (Cont.):

- Cleaning the canals:
 - Canalwater Cleaners operate monthly
 - **Q:** Could some neighborhood groups or others pitch in so it's done more regularly?
 - **Q:** Can canals be cleaned when they are drained?
 - **Q:** Can we know in advance to try and coordinate?
 - **Q:** Would Enel allow access to make this possible?
- Install neighborhood sheds—for shared tools
- City needs to install more public trash and recycling barrels everywhere
- Have DPW/Parks create and formalize an annual survey process with information about parks and their needs—it will allow city to better prioritize improvements and anticipate larger needs/expenses
- Continue to decrease littering:
 - Increase advertising about not littering and penalties for littering
 - PENALIZE people for littering—if word got out that Lowell was actually fining people for this it might help curb some of this behavior
 - Topography challenges—mesh lining along fences to stop trash from blowing around may help some areas
 - **Q:** Instead of a fine structure—incentive program?—for local landowners and businesses
- **Q:** Can the city engage crews from the area prisons to clean roadways, or pick up brush at parks, etc.?
- City needs to remove invasive species at parks
- Do something about the sign code—lots of signs that don't serve purpose or are creating a messy look to the neighborhood
- **Q:** Could more neighborhoods have a “Friends of” group to plan clean ups and schedule block parties?



Better Sidewalks & Crosswalks:

Short-term ideas:

- City sidewalks need more benches
- City should have more bike racks available on the right of way in Downtown and at all schools
- City needs to be better about painting crosswalks more often/use better materials so they don't fade
- Crosswalk images—incorporate public art
- Public art on sidewalks—temporary events/installations
- Syncing of lights with crosswalks needs to be revisited. People feel uncomfortable with the lights that allow for turns when the pedestrians have the 'walk signal'. Drivers are supposed to yield to pedestrians, but don't always do so
- Parking enforcement on sidewalks
- City should ensure call buttons at all intersections work
 - **Q:** Are they checked regularly or only based on complaints?
- Light cycles that prioritize pedestrians—Complete Streets policy

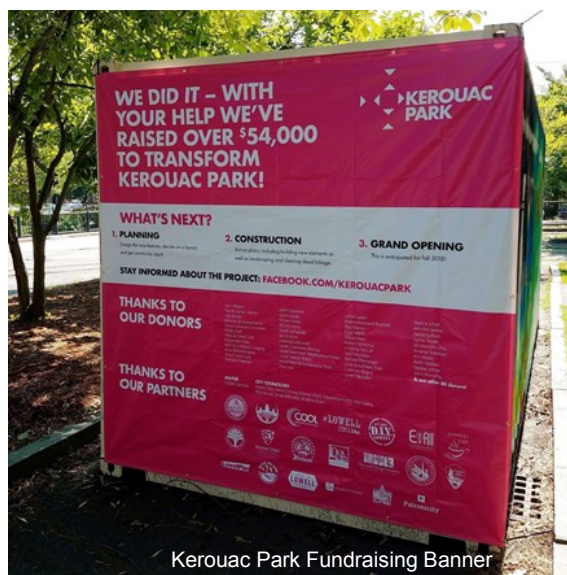
Long-term ideas:

- Crosswalks at larger park locations need to be where people actually cross
 - **Q:** Why are drivers given priority? (e.g., entrance/exit of Pyne School)
- Introduce elevated crosswalks
- Introduce more flashing signage
- Some tools we might want to consider:
 - 3D crosswalks
 - Tree root guards
 - Removable rubber crosswalks (i.e., removable in the winter)
- Lacking clear entry/crosswalks into state forest



Long-term ideas (Cont.):

- Working with American Lung Association—investing in public infrastructure—can get funding for sidewalks
- A masterplan of all crosswalks is needed
- Improvements to Kerouac Park:
 - Plan seems great
 - Getting to Kerouac Park is dangerous and it needs to be safer to access or people still won't go
 - Concern about who will manage Kerouac, i.e., who will take things down, put them away etc., it would be a shame to see things damaged/ruined after the successful fundraising
- Crossing the Boulevard is scary—even with lights and well-marked locations car speeds are really excessive
 - **Q:** do we need all that travel space for vehicles along that stretch? Road diet?
- Intersection where Rourke Bridge traffic meets Pawtucket Blvd—no pedestrian access—no crosswalks, cars drive at excessive speeds—entire intersection needs significant pedestrian improvements Community impact fee—\$\$\$ / buy-in from developers
- Safe routes to schools
- Better sidewalks, better walking tours-it attracts people
- Lord Overpass project doesn't seem pedestrian friendly
- City should invest more in sidewalks than streets, Chapter 90 funds—prioritize pedestrians over vehicles
- Sidewalks should have more of a buffer to traffic for pedestrians
- **Q:** Can city earn grants for canal trails?



Bike lanes:

Short-term ideas:

- More enforcement and education (city wide)
- Need more bike racks downtown
- Bike racks at parks—could be public art projects
- Father Morissette striping (crossing the lane at Aiken doesn't make any sense)—should be revisited
- There is no respect for bike lanes—City allows parking in bike lanes (on Boylston) regularly without penalty & city placed electronic sign directly in Andover Street bike lane—City needs to enforce its own rules
- All schools should have bike racks to show that biking is welcomed
- City needs to install more quality bike racks
- Bicycles on Merrimack & Market—popping wheelies—city needs to enforce proper biking behavior too
- Biking along Merrimack River—nice area, not everyone comfortable biking there



Long-term ideas:

- City needs to do a biking master planning process! Needs to include people at all biking levels (from ages 8-80) and for different purposes—plan should be about getting people around without cars as a mode of transportation—not just for recreational purposes. This plan must include plans for maintenance of infrastructure
- Lowell has a lot of bike lanes that go nowhere—aren't connected to any specific locations or logical travel routes—they seem to have only been created where they "fit" instead of with any kind of logical reasoning
- There needs to be way more biking education in Lowell—for drivers to understand that cyclists do have the right to the road!
- Information about available routes with existing infrastructure, etc. would be helpful for cyclists
- Lowell should have safe routes mapped out that are off major roadways where some people may be intimidated riding
- Wayfinding signage should include information about travel routes for people on bikes
- Bring bikeshare to Lowell! (Be sure the public is educated about this and how it works!)

Long-term ideas (Cont.):

- Biking should be allowed on walkways (e.g., Northern Canal) it's tight but a nice way to get around without traveling on the main road
- **Q:** Can the City repurpose some of the cement barriers used at events?
 - Rebar made into loops on them could make them bike racks. This would allow people to secure their bikes close to where events are occurring
- Delineate "Bike loops," connected trails are needed
- Plan needed for dedicated bike trails—E. Merrimack & Varnum Ave. could be a prototype
- Portable bike lanes—to pilot locations
- Lines should be re-painted EVERY year
- Work with UML to build bike culture
- Drivers might get comfortable with bikes on the street
- Cambridge is a bike city and Lowell can be one too
- **Q:** Will UML implement a ban on cars for first two years? Many colleges do

SEEN THE NEW BIKE LANES ?

New bright green bike lanes are appearing all over town. Green bike lanes, like all bike lanes, create dedicated space on the road for bicyclists. Green lanes also highlight the Merge Zone where drivers and bicyclists need to be extra aware of each other.

What to know about green bike lanes...

- 1 Like all bike lanes, the green bike lanes are for bicyclists only. It is okay to drive over bike lanes to access parking or make a turn.
- 2 When you see a bike lane that's dashed instead of solid green, that means you're in a Merge Zone where drivers can carefully enter the bike lane to make a turn.
- 3 When turning right where there's a bike lane:
 1. Signal your turn before you get to the merge zone.
 2. Yield to bicyclists already in the bike lane.
 3. When it's safe, complete your turn.

Hey, Bicyclists!
When riding in groups, stay within the bike lane.

Our Palo Alto
Visit us at www.cityofpaloalto.org/bike

Events beyond Downtown:

Short-term ideas:

- City could try and help raise the profile of events happening across the city—sometimes people aren't aware of all the things that are going on
- Lowell Cultural Council now encourages applicants for their funds to do projects outside of the Downtown area

Long-term ideas:

- More pop up events at parks—rotating at different parks across the City
- More DIY events—like the Lantern Fest
- More walking tours in other neighborhoods—most currently target the Downtown area
- South Common is such a large park it should be utilized significantly more than it is
- **Q:** Acre Fest is a great event, why aren't things like that happening in all neighborhoods?
- There's a small boat launch at Muldoon Park (31 Billerica Street/South Lowell) there can be more events there that connect to the Concord River
- **Q:** Could events like the Kinetic Sculpture race change course routes and go into other neighborhoods it hasn't done in the past?
- **Q:** Can an event like Creaticity happen in other neighborhoods—rotate locations to other neighborhoods?
- Would be nice to see more events on the south side of the river
- Events like the Tour de Lowell—should consider going through the neighborhoods
- **Q:** Could there be some kind of shuttle offered for neighborhood based events that could get people to them? (Sort of how we move people from train station/bus terminal to Downtown for Folk Fest)
- Existing events—**Q:** Is it possible to recreate them in other neighborhoods?
 - Lanterns on Ecumenical Plaza – Acre
 - Tyler Park concerts
 - Acre – Block party, Movie night.
- Group hikes in forest park—DCR 'guide'
- Ethnic festivals and celebrations



Long-term ideas (Cont.):

- Combine electric box decorating with cleanups—part of How-to/FAQ
- Neighborhood Historic Tours
- Close down neighborhoods to cars to allow “block parties”
- Other neighborhoods feel a bit “what about us?” with all the events scheduled Downtown
- Pawtucketville has issues with all the events in their neighborhood (at Sampas Pavilion)—DCR not always available to discuss issues and ways to mitigate them
- Downtown is a venue
- Short traveled distance make it more likely people will attend—if people had something in their neighborhood they will go

Miscellaneous Ideas:

- Lowell needs more publicly accessible toilets* and water bubblers
- **Q:** Can Lowell offer kayaking on the canals?
- Add motorized inflatable boats (like Zodiacs) as an option at the boathouse
- **Q:** What is the process of moving a bus stop? It appears if there's criticism to locations they are moved to other locations but may not be convenient for users?



**Issue came up MULTIPLE TIMES residents understand there are safety concerns but felt that the need to be able to access a restroom without being forced to buy something is important*

NEXT STEPS

The next public meeting for the Open Space and Recreation Plan is on **Monday August 13** from 6-8pm at the Lowell Senior Center. Residents are encouraged to attend. The meeting will focus on prioritizing many of the ideas we have heard so far from residents.

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